**Crow Indian Buffalo Pasture: American Indian and non-Indian Collaborations to Preserve Native Nature and Heritage**

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It might come as a surprise that Robert Yellowtail (1889–1988), the first American Indian to be appointed superintendent of his own reservation, turned to several local white ranchers to help him establish the Crow Buffalo Pasture on Crow Indian land in 1935. (The reservation occupies 2.2 million acres in south central Montana, USA. I use the term American Indian because that is the term that Crow people generally use to describe themselves.) At the time, these men controlled, through land leases and out-right ownership, the vast majority of ranch land on the reservation—only the latest in a long list of ways that non-Indians have historically dispossessed Indians of their natural resources. But that day, the men lent trucks and cowboys to gather and haul over 80 buffalo from Yellowstone National Park about 150 miles away to the new nature preserve high up in the Big Horn Mountains.

The basic questions that guide this article and exhibition is how can environmental protection help us bring to light the dynamics and mechanisms of Indian–white relations, and forms of American Indian heritage and nature preservation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Wilderness is a particularly powerful lens to explore these topics because it is the site of some of the most persistent and intractable myths that have popularly defined who Indians are and established historical narratives that set Indians and whites apart. In "Crow Indian Buffalo Pasture," I will re-orient those age-old wilderness myths about Indians and debunk persistent stereotypes that pit Indians against non-Indians in ahistorical and problematic ways.

I begin in the 1930s when Crow men first conceived of the idea and created the Buffalo Pasture, and I take it all the way up the present. I analyze the negotiations among the Crow Indians, the federal government, NGOS (Intertribal Buffalo Council, for one), and especially local non-Indians. Over the last nearly one hundred years, the herd had to be destroyed because of disease and because of pressure from white ranchers. Problems also arose when the herd grew too large, and animals escaped the pasture to graze on non-Indian lands. And yet, from the start, Indians have invited their white neighbors to buffalo shoots, and they have participated in the killing, the dressing of the carcass, and the meals afterward. They worked together on management projects, despite their disputes.

The point of this study is not to deny the persistent power imbalances between Indians and whites, but to show that just because one group is more powerful, does not mean the other is powerless. The history of the Crow Buffalo Pasture defies the too simple narratives that have equated Indian change with defeat and Indian–white relations solely with antagonism. Its main working argument is that Indians have relied on both their Native past and the wider world around them to build and maintain their connections to nature and their heritage. No Indigenous community is alike, but Native peoples worldwide share Crow Indians' struggle to square their own experiences with popular expectations of their Native identity as it relates to the environment. The local Crow history ties into this global story.

My work has been deeply informed by scholars from around the world who seek to challenge colonial and post-colonial narratives that have pigeonholed Indigenous people in a precolonial past. Inspired by the work of Crow elders Bill Yellowtail and Alma Snell, among so many others, this project seeks to continue their mission to draw attention to the first few

generations of American Indians born and raised on the reservation, their efforts to achieve ecological justice, and how they did so in collaboration, not only in conflict, with non-Indians.